

Mondlane, Machel and Mozambique:

From Rebellion to Revolution

Herb Shore

On a bright day in February, five years ago, Eduardo Mondlane died in a burst of flame and thunder that shattered a sun-filled morning in Dar-es-Salaam. He was murdered by a plastic bomb, planted in a book, and at that moment, for millions of men and women in Africa, time caught its breath in anguish and in anger. FRELIMO lost its leader and Africa lost a great statesman and revolutionary.

The killing of Mondlane was a desperate attempt to break a liberation movement, to shatter the spirit of its people and to destroy a nation coming to birth.

"A great sadness enveloped our people," Jorge Rebelo wrote in *Mozambique Revolution*. "Confused, they wondered how it could have happened For a few weeks the military offensive slowed down, the militia stopped cultivating and the people stopped transporting material. Each of us asked ourselves about the future of our struggle. And there were many who thought that with Mondlane a whole heritage of possibilities had been lost."¹

There were defections and divisions among the leadership. For a time it appeared as if there were internal struggles that might tear FRELIMO apart. Kavandame went over to the Portuguese and called upon all Makonde to end their resistance. Morupa went to Lisbon and became a spokesman for Portuguese colonial policy. Simango denounced FRELIMO and predicted its demise.

But if the assassination of Mondlane was meant to destroy FRELIMO, it failed. Instead he became a living legend. The war of liberation was intensified in his name. FRELIMO forces crossed the Zambezi River for the first time. The struggle spread from the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa to Tete, Zambesia and Manica y Sofala. To support the guerrilla army, a people's militia was organized in the liberated zones. The peasants were armed and the struggle entered a new phase.

1. FRELIMO Information, 1970.

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“Still it was Mondlane leading us,” Samora Machel often said. “It was his faith and belief in the people, his vision of free Mozambique, his ideas of revolution.”²

Today, five years after his murder, in the face of intensified repression, in the face of military operations and the indiscriminate use of napalm terror, in the face of a facade of so-called liberal reforms and measures of pseudo-autonomy meant to divide and undermine the movement and the country, even in the face of the formation of a powerful alliance of Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia, FRELIMO has not only survived, it has grown, matured, and become stronger. The struggle has deepened. It has been transformed from a rebellion to a revolution. More of the country has been liberated, and Mozambique has become a key Third World storm-center of change that will affect all of Africa.

If the Portuguese and their allies believed they could destroy FRELIMO by assassination they failed to understand the popular and revolutionary nature of movements opposing them in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau.

“They are fools sometimes,” Mondlane said just a few days before his death. He had just spurned an offer of “independence” for northern Mozambique under his leadership. “They don’t really understand our people or the nature of the movement. The people would throw out any leader who made a deal like that.”

He went on to speak with excitement of the changes that were taking place in FRELIMO. He was excited about progress made in the face of danger. In his usual way, he strode around the room as he spoke, punctuating all he said with large sweeping gestures, his voice shifting and changing to imitate those he talked about.

“Gwenjere, Kavandame, that group, they are finished. We are becoming stronger all the time, closer to the people, more organized. We have a program, a philosophy. We held a Congress on Mozambican soil. The lines are being drawn more sharply between those who just want to drive out the Portuguese and take their place and those who really want to change the society itself.”

He referred to the several attempts on his life. “They are determined to kill me.” He paused and shrugged. “I guess sooner or later they will. But I am not worried anymore. We really have a collective leadership. FRELIMO—the movement is greater than any one man. They don’t understand that.” He whipped a long finger through the air. “There is Marcelino, poet that he is.” He laughed. “And Samora, they don’t know him. That man is brilliant. He understands. And the others . . .”³

In the months following Mondlane’s death, a brief but intense internal struggle took place. FRELIMO’s vision of revolution was

2. Interview with Samora Machel, 1969.

3. Interview with Eduardo Mondlane, 1968.

brought into sharper focus. Its ideology was made clearer. Samora Machel and Marcelino dos Santos were elected President and Vice-President to continue and extend the work that Mondlane had begun.

As dos Santos put it, "Our goal from the beginning has been to achieve victory in the struggle for national liberation, a victory which would allow for the realization of our people's aspirations, but which at the same time would enable us to create a really new society . . . The unfolding of the struggle itself has revealed a number of contradictions which became particularly evident from the moment our guerrillas had established liberated zones, free territories. From that point on we had to solve the problem of building a new life. That is to say, not only did we have to continue the fight against Portuguese colonialism, to destroy the repressive forces, but we also had to start building and producing and creating wealth. It is precisely from that moment that there clearly appeared the fundamental contradiction which existed—not in the Mozambican population, but within the governing leadership of FRELIMO and between a faction of that leadership and the people as a whole."⁴

Political assassination and the fomenting of internal factional strife were the means by which the Portuguese and their allies expected to destroy the revolutionary nature of FRELIMO, bringing about its defeat or turning it into a docile instrument amenable to docile solutions. Kavandame tried simply to substitute himself and his associates for the Portuguese power in the economic life of liberated Cabo Delgado. Simango, in the name of black militancy, stood for an independence in which black power, regardless of its nature and simply because it was black, would be substituted for white power. Neither wished to destroy and replace structures of exploitation that the people had so long experienced in their colonial forms.

Under Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO was formed in September 1962 as a united front of several organizations, a movement rather than a structured political party. Its common bond was opposition to Portuguese power, little more than that. It began with political protest and with appeals to the government and the conscience of mankind for a redress of grievances. But already Portuguese colonial policy was no longer open, if it ever was, to any idea of African political and economic advancement, much less to ideas of self-rule. The turning point had come at Mueda in June 1960 when the massacre of peaceful petitioners, **invited to assemble by the Portuguese government itself**, showed that peaceful resistance was futile and that all possibility of gradual reform had been destroyed.

4. Interview with Marcelino dos Santos, 1970.

The so-called Portuguese “liberalism of spirit” was a mockery of the truth. Little if any liberalism that may have existed in the past survived the establishment of military rule in 1926 and the founding of Salazar’s *Estado Novo*.

Although the Portuguese claim to Mozambique goes back to the 15th century, most of the time they held it in little more than name. The population generally were either ignorant of them or hostile. Until the late 19th century, Portuguese East Africa was little more than a string of garrisons and small settlements along the Indian Ocean and up the Zambezi. The “effective occupation” required by the European scramble for Africa proved difficult to establish and maintain. African resistance and tribal wars resulted.

By the end of the European War of 1914-18, there were political forms of resistance as well. Urban Africans formed the African League which called for the national unity of all African peoples, the unity of oppressed people in the colonies, and the unity of black people everywhere. It was outlawed in 1926. In 1947-48, there were strikes on the docks and plantations, met with deportations and fierce repression. In 1956, the year that Ghana became an independent nation, Mozambican police killed 49 striking dockworkers. Secondary students, responding to the “African awakening” after World War II, formed NESAM, an organization devoted to the development of a sense of pride in the African heritage and in Mozambican nationhood. It was banned in 1964.

As overt political action was forced underground, intellectuals, especially poets and artists, turned to cultural expressions of African consciousness. They re-affirmed their African heritage, portrayed the sufferings of black people in Portuguese Africa, and called the black people of the world to rebellion.

Necessity made of FRELIMO at birth a loosely structured front of many philosophies and points of view, but Mondlane, from the outset, knew that it would have to be forged into a genuine revolutionary movement, a political party with a vision, a program and an ideology. He had seen national parties in other parts of Africa—Nkrumah’s CPP, for example—bog down in stagnation. Led by minorities of educated men, mainly in the towns, many who had spent long years in European or American exile, they carried the peasants and the workers only by a broad and general acclamation, a surge to freedom. But these leaders expected little more from the people than simply to be followed. After independence, the gap widened between leaders and led, between town and villages. National leaders were vague and distant figures who visited their local constituencies only when they needed votes. The result was what Julius Nyerere calls “flag independence”, without political and economic transformation—without freedom. Nation after nation fell victim to forms of neo-colonialism.

“For my part,” Frantz Fanon wrote in *Towards an African Revolution*, “the deeper I enter into the cultures and political circles of

Africa, the surer I become that the great danger which threatens Africa is the absence of ideology.”⁵

The leadership of FRELIMO was aware of the need for ideology, but they were equally aware of the danger of mechanically applied ideological systems. Revolutions could learn from each other, but they could not simply imitate each other and impose structures and methods without regard for the specific conditions and the specific cultures of the country and its people.

...“Our movement,” Mondlane said, “would have to be a revolution, we knew. It would have to be a peasant revolution, for we are a nation of peasants. But most of all it would have to be a Mozambican revolution, thoroughly so.”

When I asked Samora Machel what led him to the struggle and to FRELIMO, he smiled and said, “Perhaps you might expect me to say I read Lenin and all the other books, but that is not the way it happened. As a boy I went with my father. He was forced to raise cotton. I learned from the way he was cheated when he brought his crop to sell. From my own life I was led to FRELIMO. . .”⁶

Mozambican leaders have learned much from the models of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Cuba. They have read a great deal. But the shape of their revolution was forged in the struggle, in the liberation process itself.

FRELIMO’s analysis is fundamentally socialist, but it is based upon the social reality of Mozambique. It deals with the specifics of oppression and the need for action, the forms of action and the bases upon which a new nation must be built.

Not long before his death, Mondlane wrote, “Liberation to us is not simply a matter of expelling the Portuguese . . . the point of the war is to build a new Mozambique, not just to destroy the colonial regime.”⁷

Armed struggle and nation building had to go on at the same time. A new consciousness had to be created. There had to be an affirmation of a new way of life that would be more just and more humane. “The purpose of our struggle,” says a message from the Central Committee, “is not only to destroy. It is first and foremost aimed at building a new Mozambique where there will be no hunger, and men and women will be truly free and equal.”⁸

The society had to be organized so that leadership meant service to the community and not personal power. There had to be a social revolution that would create viable alternatives to the Portuguese system. This began with two years of political preparation before the armed struggle was launched. Both Mondlane and Machel have

5. *Towards an African Revolution*, London, 1967, p. 186.

6. Interview with Samora Machel, 1970.

7. *The Struggle for Mozambique*, London, 1969., pp. 219-21.

8. 25 September 1967.

described this as a difficult but most important aspect of the campaign for national liberation.

“When millet sprouts up in our fields, it is because we had previously prepared the ground, watered the seed with the sweat of our own work. The future is always built on the everyday work of our hands and minds.”

Armed struggle began as a carefully organized guerrilla war in the countryside, flexible, imaginative and highly mobile. From a small band of fewer than 200 men, the guerrilla army grew to a force of 8,000 by the time of Mondlane’s death. It was increasingly representative of the people, principally peasants, many unable even to speak Portuguese. Although most members of the army naturally came from the areas of the heaviest fighting, by 1969 guerillas came from all over Mozambique. It was FRELIMO’s conscious and careful policy to mingle people from different areas in the army, each unit being composed of men and women from different ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds, to help transform tribal and regional identities into a national and revolutionary consciousness.

A people’s militia was formed to support the guerrilla army and to be responsible for the defense of the liberated zones. Women are now in the ranks of both. They receive political and military training, participate in combat—in ambushes, raids, mining operations, defense of the liberated areas—and they work in the department of security. They play key roles too in the political mobilization and education of the people, in social welfare and in the schools.

The policy of establishing liberated zones—areas where the population could be mobilized politically, socially, and economically and maintain itself in general security from Portuguese ground action—was crucial to the success of the war and the foundation of a nation that would revolutionize people’s lives. Although a guerrilla war could be launched from outside the country, it had to have its roots, its centers of control and its important bases inside the country. The building of liberated areas, therefore, no matter how small, had to be undertaken right from the beginning. And there has been a continued extension of these in an economic, political, social and cultural sense as well.

Marcelino dos Santos explained, “ . . . we must understand clearly the phenomena which occur during the struggle. We must always bear in mind that our goal is the liberation of the people, and that it is important for us to shape human relationships which will mirror what we want Mozambican society to become . . . We have to create relationships of identification between the fighters and the general population, between the leaders and the guerrillas. All this constitutes the reality of our work, and if the revolutionary struggle has so far triumphed, it is because we have always respected these principles . . . it was only in this way that we could, through the various stages of our struggle, promote a constant development or unfolding of the

revolutionary process of national liberation . . . Today in our country we have begun to shape a reality which is itself a great conquest."⁹

In the liberated regions of Niassa and Cabo Delgado and some parts of Tete, the bases of popular political power and administration have been established. Economic and commercial activity have been developed, principally around agriculture and crafts. Through Tanzanian cooperation, trade and commerce have been established with several African and European nations. The liberated areas now export peanuts, oil seeds, cashew nuts, castor oil plants, sesame and crafts. Programs in health, welfare and education have also been established in all the free areas of Mozambique. These include, among other things, four years of primary education, a teacher training school, hospitals and clinics, para-medical teams, training centers for paramedics, and an orphanage system for those children whose families have died in the struggle. The schools and all the units of the health and welfare program, like the army and the militia, attempt to deal with the question of creating a national consciousness and eliminating a narrow ethnicity. Children from different ethnic backgrounds are mingled in the hope that a sense of nationhood and national culture will transcend tribal identification and loyalties.

FRELIMO is building a revolution in the course of the struggle itself. By 1970, the sixth anniversary of the war, Samora Machel was able to say, "A mango does not become a great tree in its first day, but like a growing mango tree, we are deeply rooted in the soil that is our people, and the masses are now tasting the first fruits."¹⁰

The war in Mozambique is one of endless discussion. "Talk to the people, listen to the people," is a concept that is at the heart of both Mondlane's and Machel's view of revolution. There are frequent meetings to discuss the nature of the struggle and of the enemy. There is constant political discussion and a continuous war of ideas against fear, ignorance and superstition. There is a devotion to study. Machel and other leaders are **of** the people and **with** them daily, constantly seeking fresh ideas, setting new structures, building new forms of participatory democracy. Difficulties, failures, mistakes are openly and fully discussed. Constructive criticism and self-criticism are part of the people's daily lives.

In building a new consciousness, African traditions and customs are neither romanticized and idealized, nor arbitrarily uprooted and discarded. Traditional religious customs, song and dance forms, folk tales, and other elements of African cultures are used as a cohesive force contributing to the growing sense of community and continuity.

9. Interview with Marcelino dos Santos, 1970.

10. Message, September 25, 1970.

At the same time, there is an awareness that the transition to the technology of the modern world demands profound cultural change in which many of the ways of the past must become dignified memories.

Since the assassination of Mondlane and the intensification of the war, especially as the guerrilla campaigns have spread into other in the south, the Portuguese have intensified the repression and terror turned loose upon the people of Mozambique. Hospitals and field stations are increasingly filled with victims of napalm. The war from the air grows more savage. Torture and summary executions are frequent, and villages and towns are sometimes ringed with Portuguese armor. To control the population, they are resorting to the British and American inspired policy of "strategic villages", **aldeamentos**, represented as liberal social reforms, as ways of bettering the lives of the people. Still, **Noticios** of Lourenco Marques describes one of these villages, Marere, as being under twenty-four hour armed vigil from all sides.

No longer able to deny the existence of the war as they did in the past, they now resort to repeated announcements of final victory and the demise of the enemy. As early as 1965, the Premier was already telling the nation that "the war in the Overseas Provinces is finished." But in July 1969, aware that they had actually lost the initiative and in the belief that they could regain it, the Portuguese felt the need to prove that they could clear the guerrillas from their strongest held areas. They chose Cabo Delgado and the resulting campaign was a hard-fought failure for them. In May 1970, they tried again. They launched the widely-publicized "Operation Gordian Knot", designed to "put an end to the war once and for all." According to the Portuguese themselves, they deployed 35,000 troops with 15,000 tons of military equipment. They used specially trained units, **cacadores especiais**, the "special hunters" in the field, and threw jet fighters, bombers, helicopters, anti-mine cars and armored cars into the battles. This campaign constituted the first real test for the entire organization of FRELIMO, political and military. It was a major turning point of the war and was again a failure for the Portuguese. Since then, they have continued the policy of mounting campaigns with fanfare and announcing impending doom for the Mozambican revolution.

The dam and the power project at Cahora Bassa and its scheme to settle one million white immigrants in Tete Province are proving increasingly costly in human lives, morale, material and financial expenditures under pressure from FRELIMO ambushes, mining operations and other forms of harrassment. Tete has become a major center of conflict. Cahora Bassa, meant to be a source of cheap power for South Africa and Rhodesia even more than Mozambique, has become the hub of the white southern African alliance. Prime Minister Vorster has stated publicly that "the frontier of South Africa is now at the Zambezi." South African and Rhodesian troops and other forces are involved in the ground and air operations in Tete.

At stake in the Mozambican struggle is not only a nation and its people, but all of southern Africa, perhaps all of Africa. Southern Africa could easily become a bridgehead for the recolonization of the continent. A free southern Africa, on the other hand, could become a base for its economic and social transformation.

South Africa has already made Swaziland, Botswana, Malawi and Lesotho economic dependencies. They have brought Portugal and Rhodesia into an intimate and subordinate economic alliance. They have involved themselves in the fighting and at the same assisted in the promotion of a scheme for apparently autonomous or even independent states of Mozambique and Angola as part of a Portuguese commonwealth or family and economically dependent upon South Africa.

The policies of FRELIMO long anticipated the formation of a white southern African alliance, and so close ties were established with the South African, Rhodesian, and Southwest African liberation movements as well as with the other movements against Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Guinea-Bissau.

The South Africans are moving toward greater and greater confrontation and all signs point toward the increasing possibility of a guerrilla war spreading over all of southern Africa. South African and Portuguese violence could also involve Tanzania, Zambia and even Zaire. The threat to world peace would be great, for the scale of this confrontation could surpass that of Viet Nam and would inevitably become linked with the conflict in the Middle East.

Like the peoples of Asia, Africans have demonstrated and are demonstrating that they can fight and win guerrilla wars of national liberation against vastly superior technological and economic power. The southern African alliance could not deal with a highly mobile guerrilla war spread over the areas of Mozambique, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), South Africa, Southwest Africa (Namibia) and Angola. Nor could they deal with the kind of revolution that FRELIMO is bringing into being as long as the political and military leadership of such movements as FRELIMO remains in the hands of uncorrupted, strong, enlightened and revolutionary men and women. To destroy these leaders and place the fate of these movements in weaker hands is the purpose of the strategy of political assassination.

As Mondlane pointed out before his death, "the myth of Portuguese strength has been destroyed. (This) has already radically changed prospects for the whole of Mozambique and perhaps even in the long run for the whole of southern Africa."¹¹

11. Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique*, (Penguin, 1969), p. 222

The strength of the liberation movements such as FRELIMO and their most significant contribution to African liberation, lies not in military victories alone, but even more in the conscious and deepening revolutionary base that is being developed, in the concepts of liberation as social transformation, in the specific ideas of African revolution that emerge from the struggle.

The people of Mozambique, under the leadership of Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel, have chosen the path of radical structural change and revolutionary politics based on the specifics of their own country. From their struggle are emerging new modes of living, new relationships and structures that may indeed help to mold the Africa of the future.

Today
our Revolution
is a great flower
to which each day
new petals are added.
The petals are the land
reconquered,
the people freed,
the fields cultivated.

.....

Our Dream has the size
of Freedom.



This picture and the poem appeared in FRELIMO's 1969 New Year's card.